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The teleology of participation

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Abstract
Within the past 10-15 years, international development has seen a dramatic proliferation in participatory and empowering interventions seeking to help people help themselves. Common to these otherwise heterogeneous efforts is a claim not to take away peoples’ initiatives and responsibilities for their own lives. Often, these types of participatory initiatives are formulated in opposition to a past development that was ‘Eurocentric’, ‘top-down’, ‘paternalist’ and even ‘arrogant’. At the same time, very little attention has been paid to the implicit notions of improvability and progress involved when target groups are classified as ‘incapable’, ‘unaware’ or ‘irresponsible’ to varying degrees. By suggesting a framework for problematising and historicising the notion of ‘participation’, this paper will demonstrate how ‘not doing the job for other people, but helping them to do their own jobs’ remains a highly normative, teleological and guided process.

Key words
Participation, development, rationality, symbolic efficacy, practical efficacy

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Introduction

The 1990s bore witness to an unprecedented dissemination of practices of international development to all corners of the world as ‘developing country’ ministries, the World Bank, UN development agencies, bilateral development organisations, more than 28,000 NGOs (cf. Hulme & Edwards 1997: 4) and a rising number of social movements sought to empower, revive and develop an ever increasing variety of target groups. Today’s participatory development initiatives, good governance efforts and empowering interventions have all had their part in a general rejection of what are now considered the outdated and defunct top-down development strategies of the 1980s and 70s.

This comprehensive recast of strategies and practices of international development can also be discerned within a renewed - if not rejuvenated - field of ‘children in development’. New methodologies for child participation, a UN convention on the rights of the child and an overall rethinking of the child’s role in development processes suggest a reconfigured developmental rationality, the outline of which will be sketched in this article. In general, new methodologies for working with children in development (e.g. child participation or child-to-child approaches) tend to dismiss what is seen as an overly narrow view of children as vulnerable and incapable victims, opting instead to treat children as resources and partners, able to play an active role in their own development when allowed to express their own interests and unravel their individual potentials (Institute for Child Rights and Development 2001: 5). It is argued that ‘previous models of care have promoted a ‘needs approach’, which focused on meeting or satisfying basic needs... often based on pity or charity as opposed to support for children as full human beings’ (ibid.). Now, children are no longer only to be protected against exploitation, they are just as importantly to be included in processes of development - ‘as active participants in finding and creating solutions’ (ibid.) - through participatory and empowering measures that give them the opportunity to influence decisions that will affect their own futures. This entails leaving behind paternalist development strategies where child participation has (if anything) been no more than a formality and

moving towards methodologies that allow children to initiate activities themselves and to play an important part in community decision-making (cf. Hart 1992).

Rather than trying to evaluate to which extent today’s development programmes and projects in fact do include their target groups as active partners, I will in the following suggest a framework for problematising, denaturalising and historicising some of the central categories underlying contemporary development efforts. While the majority of the debate on methods of participatory development have focused on how to optimise levels and types of participation, for example through a Child-to-Child approach which ‘involve[s] children in decision-making rather than merely using them as communicators of adult messages’ (Child-to-Child 2002), there has been little scrutiny of the normative goals entailed by these strategies. By analysing what problems it is that today’s participatory and empowering development efforts are seen as a solution to and also how these methodologies are put into practice to solve these very problems, I will show how ‘not doing the job for other people, but helping them to do their own jobs’ remains a highly normative, teleological and guided process. While it will definitely not be a part of my argument to question the nobility of motives behind any efforts to improve the quality of life of any persons anywhere in the world, it is my intent to tackle that which is more often than not taken for granted in current debates about participation. By problematising some of the central categories in these debates I will point out the inherent futility in the current search for a non-paternalist development.

Finally, it should be underlined from the outset that the focus of this article is much more on the concept of ‘participation’ than it is specifically about children’s participation. The case material that will be presented in the following does not come from development projects dealing specifically with children, however, the problematisations that will be raised do undoubtedly have their relevance for child-rights based approaches as well. At the same time

the article will show how ideas of maturation, incapacity or vulnerability are not solely confined to the field of children in development.

The underdeveloped as victims

As already suggested, one of the key characteristics of this recent[1] recast of rationalities and practices of international development has been the transformation of the ‘underdeveloped’ from having been seen as deprived victims to being responsible and active citizens. Whether victims of a world economic order or bad governmental policy, the ‘underdeveloped’ of the early 1980s and 1970s were consistently located within a realm of statistical inevitabilities which provided a largely environmental account of the causes of individual success and failure. As sociologist Nikolas Rose has pointed out in his article on the ‘death of the social’, even if these past strategies of government did accord individuals with ‘personal responsibility for their conduct, this individual responsibility was always traversed by external determinations: the advantages or disadvantages conferred by family background, social class, life history, located within a wider array of social and economic forces such as changes in the labour market, booms, slumps, industrial cycles’ (Rose 1996: 333). Such external determinations in turn called for top-down interventions that sought to influence social and economic forces so as to create the best possible effects for individuals in the form of ‘trickle down’ benefits or restructured accessibility to resources.

Today, however, not only is this view of the underdeveloped as dependent victims rejected, the top-down strategies which were supposedly implemented to assist the underdeveloped are charged with actually having exacerbated their dependency and underdevelopment. Development organisations themselves have joined critics in conceding that their own top-down development strategies ‘did not involve impoverished communities in their own development... keeping them dependent on outside assistance’, ‘demotivated ordinary people, whose energies were most needed to be mobilized in the development effort’, ‘t[ook] away the initiative from the people, diluting their sense of responsibility for their own lives’

and generally treated target groups as passive recipients of development aid (UNDP Vietnam 1999a: 13; World Bank 1989: 3; Danish Association for International Co-operation 1998: 22). In other words, top-down, non-participatory strategies of development are seen to have pacified and demotivated underdeveloped target groups, diluting their sense of responsibility and further increasing their dependency on outside assistance.

As a remedy to these failures and shortcomings of past strategies, participatory development methodologies have sought to activate the ‘underdeveloped’ into developing themselves by encouraging active participation. Indeed, this new or so-called ‘alternative development’ has often been formulated in opposition to a ‘top down’ development that was ‘paternalist’, ‘Eurocentric’ and even ‘arrogant’ (cf. Haq 1995, Chambers 1984, Escobar 1995). Instead of telling target groups what to do or even altogether doing their work for them, participatory development aims to listen to what the poor have to say and to help them help themselves. The development expert has become a facilitator, a midwife figure helping others to achieve what it is they want to do (cf. Danish Association of International Co-operation 1998: 20). In this way, it is argued, an evolutionary and linear view of development can finally be abandoned since the participatory method by definition excludes pre-defined goals and initiatives as these must instead arise from the process of development itself. In short, participatory development is often seen as the final transcendence of a paternalist past where the underdeveloped were taken to be incapable, ignorant and/or vulnerable victims.

Technologies of agency and performance

These claims considered, surprisingly little attention has been paid to date to the implicit notions of improvability and progress that unquestionably do permeate participatory development efforts. Cooke and Kothari (2001) have described what they see as grave discrepancies between the promises of participatory development and the outcomes of implemented participatory projects, questioning whether indeed target groups have been empowered. Similarly, Pender (2002) has questioned whether the ‘voices of the poor’ are in

fact being listened to in participatory development efforts. However, little work has been done to identify the norms, concepts and categories that organise and justify participatory development.

By examining two concrete community development projects from Vietnam and Namibia respectively, both of which sought to activate their target groups into helping themselves, I will in the following argue that participatory development remains as evolutionary and guided as ever. I will also argue that participatory development is built up around norms of ‘maturity’, ‘awareness’ and ‘responsibility’. While the two projects chosen were not specifically aimed at children, their development methodologies will, as already suggested, nevertheless allow me to problematise some of the central categories behind ‘participation’.

The empirical data comes from a comprehensive collection of project documentation, including project documents, mid-term evaluations, facilitator manuals, budgets, facilitator diaries and final reports. For the Namibian case, project documents were obtained from the library of Ibis’ (a Danish development NGO) programme workers in Denmark, while the Vietnamese project documents were obtained in Hanoi from the project’s facilitators. The choice of two projects from vastly different geographical (urban slums and rural villages) and cultural (South East Asia and Southern Africa) areas does not in anyway suggest a homogeneity. However, what they do have in common is their choice of development methodologies, and it is the participatory development methodology itself that is the object of this article.

In Namibia, the Danish NGO, Ibis, worked from 1993 to 1996 with its “Oshakati Human Settlement Improvement Project” to physically upgrade shanty towns by promoting community participation in the planning and implementation of such activities. To prepare the project, the project planning committee began already in 1991 to consult with as many stakeholders as possible, ranging from local government representatives, traditional chiefs

residing in the shanty towns as well as the shanty dwellers themselves. This was done primarily through interviews and the idea of forming participatory community development committees was discussed in depth with traditional chiefs who were encouraged to stand for election. One of the projects greatest tasks initially was to ‘persuade all the headmen in the project locations of the necessity to abandon their traditional rights over the allocation of land in favour of the Community Development Committees: no mean achievement!’ (Ibis 1994: 8). By 1993, the project had mobilised the relevant stakeholders and the Community Development Committees began planning and implementing their own self-identified shanty-upgrading development initiatives.

Similarly, in Vietnam, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) has since 1995 been working to strengthen the capacity of Tuyen Quang and Yen Bai villagers to work with participatory planning methods and to implement their own poverty eradication initiatives. Here, ‘villages already had a strong tradition of group meetings and decision making on a consensual basis’ (UNDP Vietnam 1999: §44) and UNDP’s development officers have sought to integrate these traditions as much as possible into the Village Development Boards created by the project. The development boards meet largely in accordance with traditional village gatherings, but a number of new decision-making procedures have been introduced such as democratic votes with the inclusion of women. The village development boards have since their formation been responsible for designing and implementing village development plans which meet the priorities that they themselves have identified with the help of Participatory Rural Appraisal methods.

To begin with, it is important to understand what participation was seen as a solution to in these two cases. The familiar criticisms of top down development strategies mentioned earlier have in fact already introduced the first elements of the participatory problem: passivity, dependency, demotivation and a diluted sense of responsibility. Moreover, while participatory development efforts clearly regard their target groups as potentially capable

subjects, there does remain an initial perceived incapacity or lack of skills which makes outside intervention necessary in the first place. In Namibia, for example, Ibis’ project team concluded that their target group of shanty dwellers had ‘little experience of collective decision-making, and of balancing different interests represented in the community’ and also that ‘clearly, for householders and community organisations... to be able to make and implement appropriate decisions, they must be equipped with, or have access to, the right supports (information, technical and managerial skills, training, financial resources) that will enable them to operate’ (Ibis 1991: 37; Ibis 1992: 6). The Vietnamese villagers were similarly described by UNDP as hindered by ‘low knowledge, high illiteracy’ and ‘passive behaviour in which directives received from above were routinely executed unquestioned’ (UNDP Vietnam 1999b: 2; UNDP Vietnam 1999c: §39).

If we bear in mind that the ultimate goal of participatory interventions is that ‘communities *in time* will be able to manage their own problems and projects’ (Ibis 1991: 38, my emphasis), then it becomes clear that even those participatory projects which are loathe to describe their target groups as in any way inferior end up identifying their partners as in an initial state of (albeit counter actable) incapacity. This apparent paradox of treating partners as (potentially) capable equals while at the same time seeing them as relatively incapable was addressed by UNDP’s project team in Vietnam: ‘In the development process it has to be recognised that the rural poor are not only capable, but are also willing to change their conditions. However, they do not know how to do this. The process of social mobilisation helps them by organising and guiding them’ (UNDP Vietnam 1999a: 4). In other words, while the underdeveloped are definitely seen as having the potential to manage their own problems, development organisations must help them initially by strengthening their abilities to act for themselves.

In a similar vein, Ibis’ Project Proposal Updating Mission found ‘overwhelming evidence in the informal settlements of urban Namibia that individuals, in some cases communities, have the ingenuity, skills, energy and access to (limited) financial resources to be able to organise

and construct their own dwellings with little or no outside assistance. However, the process is often inefficient and the result unhealthy, unsafe and provides limited amenity’ (Ibis 1992: 5). Hence the need for outside assistance. In effect, a teleology becomes apparent in this movement in time from a target group initially considered *not* to be in a position to manage its own problems satisfactorily to a post-intervention target group which has acquired the skills and abilities to manage its own problems.

In view of this, it is possible to understand participatory development projects in terms of a variety of different elements (which can of course vary considerably depending on the context and culture) all commonly working to rouse target groups out of perceived states of passivity and incapacity. The cure for such anomalous states are then found in the technologies of agency and performance that make up concrete participatory development interventions. By technologies of agency (cf. Dean 1999) I mean all those micro methods and techniques which have been designed to incite the active participation of target groups, to have them identify their own developmental problems, prioritise these and propose solutions which they then can implement themselves.

As already mentioned, both the Vietnamese and Namibian projects had their target groups organise themselves into Community Development Committees comprised of elected representatives, which could then call public meetings for the brainstorming and prioritisation of local development problems. The Oshakati Community Development Committees, for example, were trained in how to hold public Logical Framework sessions through which problem-trees could be prepared by asking participants to ‘define the problems of your area. Write them on pieces of paper and stick them on the wall. Group the problems, i.e. related to health in one group, problems related to land in another, etc.’ (Ibis 1996: 5). As a part of these sessions, participants were also asked to come up with possible solutions to the sanitation, health, electricity and traffic problems that they had raised, all of which were again noted, debated and voted upon. Responsibility for proposed upgrading activities was then

delegated to those members of the community who had some vocational training within the problem sectors identified.

In Tuyen Quang, Village Development Boards took ‘the lead and responsibility for conducting initial Participatory Rural Appraisal exercises and for evaluation or revision of existing development plans’ (UNDP Vietnam 1999c: §42). Villagers were instructed in and given the responsibility for ranking households through wealth ranking exercises, which identified those eligible for specific project benefits. Through their appraisal sessions, villagers identified irrigation and access to credit as among their most urgent needs, and as a result they elected a ‘savings/credit group’ and a ‘water users group’ as part of their self-designed development plan. These groups were then responsible for collecting obligatory, monthly savings as well as water users’ fees from members of their villages (ibid.: § 42, § 51).

All such micro techniques of committee meetings, voting, debating, ranking and prioritising work to enhance the possibilities of agency of underdeveloped target groups by improving their skills and encouraging them to take part in their communities’ development. For, as the participatory argument goes, ‘one does not learn from standing by somebody else’s side and watching others’, since ‘if someone does service to other people, the beneficiaries may be able to reap the fruits of the work but they may not value it very much – and they will definitely not be able to replicate the process’ (Ibis 1996: 25; Danish Association for International Co-operation 1998: 22).

On the other hand, not only did the development organisations arrive in Tuyen Quang, Yen Bai and Oshakati with the promise of development funds. They also carried with them an entire manual of pre-conditions, specifying how village organisations were to be created, how terms of partnership between target group and development agency were to be drawn up, how public meetings were to be held, how funds were to be disbursed and how ‘appropriate decisions’ were to be made. Such technologies of performance consist of all those

procedures of decision-making, accountability, transparency, monitoring, incentive, disincentive and evaluation which aim to ensure that all those involved can and do become fully engaged, while at the same time contractually obliging target groups to carry out regular reporting, auditing and monitoring. In Vietnam, this process included forming a Village Development Board, drawing up Terms of Partnership, hiring Village Activists, holding Village Meetings, preparing Village Development Plans and creating a Village Credit fund. In Oshakati, Ibis’ project facilitators used public meetings ‘to assess; how well the Community Development Committee has grasped the project’s concepts; how well organised and motivated the committee is; how the community reacts to a committee call to meet and hence the likely level of respect for the Community Development Committee’ (Ibis 1993: 4). Moreover, through these meetings in Oshakati, ‘the Community Development Committee [was] ‘guided’ towards accepting initial activities’ (ibid.) by the project facilitators, as a way to kick-start the upgrading of their shanty towns. The point here being that even if participatory development is geared towards listening to what the poor have to say, it remains a highly guided affair, requiring facilitator-monitored rules of the game.

The facilitator

Even if participatory development experts tend to downplay their own importance by arguing that they are ‘not doing the job for other people, but helping them to do their own jobs’, their roles nevertheless remain pivotal to development projects. It is true that today’s facilitators are urged to remain ‘substance-neutral’ throughout a development intervention, letting villagers identify, prioritise and implement their own development objectives. However, as discovered in the Vietnamese project, they do have their work cut out for them in trying to ‘avoid raising unrealistic and high expectations [within] the target community’, ‘ensure that discussions are not hijacked by a few influentials’, ‘verify that [proposed] activities are realistic in terms of resources, time and capacity available’, ‘ensure that Village Organisation members understand the purpose of holding... meetings’ and ‘ensure that identified needs

reflect the ideas of the majority population (especially poor and women)’ (UNDP Vietnam 1999a: 7, 10).

In this sense, the art of facilitating is about tapping into and extorting the self-expressed needs and wants of the poor. Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA), Logical Framework workshops, Rapid Rural Appraisals (RRA), Self-esteem, Associative strengths, Resourcefulness, Action planning, and Responsibility (SARAR) exercises, Optimal Participation at All Levels (OPAL – specifically designed for illiterate people) sessions and many other similar development methodologies have all been designed as forums where the individual needs and desires of all members of a community can be formulated into a common ‘vision’ through debate and voting. The facilitator is present ‘to supervise the whole process carefully and to guide community members’, taking care to ensure that all decisions made along the way are both ‘appropriate’ and ‘realistic’ and to ensure that discussions are not hijacked (UNDP Vietnam 1999a: 13).

At the same time, the facilitator must also, and often concurrently, act as controller to ensure that the target group works in accordance with and fulfils the obligations stated in formulated terms of partnership. To be sure, however, it is a specific aim of participatory interventions that the role of outside facilitators becomes progressively redundant through ‘a phased transfer of knowledge and skills... and a gradual handing over of responsibility for implementation’ (Ibis 1996: 22) allowing target groups to become increasingly independent, self-managing and active. Indeed, this gradual transfer of tutelary and agency powers from development organisation to target group is openly indicated in the unifying catch-phrases of today’s many different participatory strategies of development - helping people to help themselves.

Of course, development agencies like Ibis are constantly mindful of the fine balance between their role as facilitator and their role as controller and as they put it, ‘a potential problem is

that Ibis mixes up the two roles... One might, unconsciously or consciously, take advantage of the position as donor/controller to impose political objectives or organisational solutions on the partner under cover as facilitator. Thus, in the worst case scenario, the role as facilitator might be an excuse for rather paternalistic behaviour... [and] Ibis might end up functioning as a puppeteer’ (Ibis 1996: 21). We saw above how the participatory development expert must always do his or her best to ensure that ‘target communities… take up responsibility at all stages – from needs identification to finding solutions to planning and to implementing activities’ (UNDP Vietnam 1999b: 7), but the expert has to balance this prerequisite with an outstanding need for supervision, monitoring and guidance.

The selection and training of Village Activists in Vietnam and Community Activators in Namibia were an important part of the respective projects, as concrete measures to transfer responsibilities to their target groups. In Oshakati, Community Activators came from the outside to ‘mobilise, motivate, activate, raise awareness and build capacities of the communities... and [to] guide the communities to become more self-sufficient and responsible for their own development’ (Ibis 1993: 2). These Activators introduced villagers to the various procedures for forming development committees, holding public meetings, keeping records, etc. In Vietnam, it was preferred that Activists were chosen from potential candidates within the target villages who, among other virtues, should ‘preferably be literate, have the reputation of being honest, not be selfish and have a track record of making efforts for the betterment of the people’ (UNDP Vietnam 1999a: 12). The performance of Activists would then be continuously monitored by Village Organisation members and ‘in case of [their] performance being unsatisfactory, the... members can replace these activists by selecting some more capable members within the Village Organisation’ (ibid.: 13). Together with project facilitators, Village Activists ensured ‘discipline in attending meetings’, prepared agendas, recorded meeting minutes, registered attendance as well as maintained ‘discipline... during the meetings (e.g. starting on time, attending sober)’ (ibid.: 14-16).

Clearly, this fine balance between facilitation and control becomes even more accentuated when dealing with child participation projects. Even when children are encouraged to participate and initiate activities themselves, the need for guidance and facilitation never becomes fully redundant, and it is this new role of facilitation for developers working with children that deserves further scrutiny. It is dubious at best to claim that the increased participation and influence of target groups in decision-making procedures has been matched by a corresponding decrease in supervision and guidance.

Gradations of capability

It should be clear from the above that in spite of any claims to the contrary, participatory development remains an evolutionary and linear form of improvement, albeit of an entirely different form from that which characterised the top-down strategies of the past. What I mean by this is that there certainly is a continuum of participatory development which moves from the relatively incapable target group with ‘limited local capacity for management and implementation of development activities’ to the target group which is finally ‘able to manage their own problems and projects’ (Ibis 1996: 20). Or in the words of another Danish NGO, a continuum along which a target group can ‘reach a level of ‘maturity’’ as it ‘moves through stages of naive, immediately perceived consciousness to a stage of critical consciousness’ (Danish Association for International Co-operation 1998: 62, 53). This move is of course overly clear when dealing with children who are by definition seen as developing and maturing, gaining skills and competencies along the way. But such continuums of personal maturation and development are definitely not limited to projects focusing on children’s participation, rather they make up an integral part of every participatory development intervention.

Perhaps practitioners of participatory development have ceased chanting grand theories of economic growth and nation-state building, but they have only done this in favour of a

gradation of capabilities. The evolutionary stages of development have in effect been displaced, refolded back on to the individual or community, who can now be taxonomized according to evolving capacities, evolving awareness and evolving responsibility. And it is the categorisations, norms and concepts that underlie and organise these taxonomies of participatory development that have yet to be adequately historicized and denaturalised. For example, there are clearly quite specific and often scientific conceptions and representations of what it is to be human at play here. The subject of participation is seen to be made up of individual capacities, desires, interests and potentials, the strengthening, unravelling and following of which entails continuums of maturation (as target individuals gain new skills and experience), conscientisation (as target individuals learn to express and tap into their personal desires and ambitions through community meetings) and responsibilisation (as target individuals are gradually handed over responsibility and are held increasingly accountable). The metaphor of the child maturing into an adult has ever since the dawn of the human sciences in the 18th century played a key role in understanding societal progress (cf. Wahlberg 2001) and it continues to have implications far beyond the specific field of children in development today.

In other words, the historically datable conceptions and categorisations of participatory development that I have briefly reviewed in this article owe a great deal to the norms of maturity and personal development that have come out of psychological, pedagogical, anthropological and sociological theories. It is against such norms that the justification of participatory interventions are made, as those who have yet to attain that certain state of personal development which allows for self-management become the ‘underdeveloped’ of participatory development. And it is by scrutinising the processes of diagnosing states of capability, awareness or responsibility in participatory development efforts that we will gain an understanding of the historicity of participation.

Having said this, however, it is important not to confuse my argument on the historical contingency of participatory development with some kind of a constructionist view of the world. The conceptions and categorisations which allow for the taxonomisation of target groups according to gradations of capability in participatory development efforts are *not* yet another set of mere constructions that somehow serve to obscure a more authentic reality. On the contrary, they have a very palpable symbolic efficacy allowing development experts, social movement representatives, facilitators and the like to differentiate and classify target groups according to their respective capabilities of self-management.

Just as importantly though, these conceptions and categorisations also carry with them a very practical efficacy in prescribing specific techniques to tackle such anomalies as demotivation, passivity, incapacity and unawareness. The implementation of participatory development initiatives in Africa or Asia is made possible through the practical application of the taxonomies, categories and conceptions of participatory development. Tools for promoting the agency and awareness of target groups have a practical efficacy that is derived from their conceptual base. And, it is this interplay between the symbolic and practical efficacies of the conceptions, categories and norms underlying contemporary practices of development, that I argue deserves far more attention. Efforts should be made to historicize these concepts and practices, not to uncover some kind of a hoax, but rather to demonstrate their efficacy and contingency.

Conclusion - historicising children’s participation

In the same way that I have chosen to look at the notion of ‘participation’ in general terms here, the growing field of ‘children in development’ literature faces a task in historicising the conceptions of the child that everyday are being put into play all over the world. What James *et al.* have called the ‘rise of childhood agency’ (1998: 6) in the theoretical ‘imagining of childhood’ has been mirrored in the renewed focus on the relative capabilities, resources and competencies of children in development.

Child participation projects, applications of the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other new methodologies of child development are of course built around conceptions of what it is to be a child, how a child can develop and mature, what specific needs and potentials an individual child has, etc. All of these conceptions have a concrete history and deserve to be treated as artefacts with symbolic and practical efficacies that can be witnessed in concrete practices of child participation. Protecting the vulnerable child while developing the resourceful and capable child, entails the diagnosing of their states of vulnerability as well as the classification of their capabilities according to gradated taxonomies.

It is important to underline that what is at stake in such an approach as I have argued for here is neither the motives of those working to protect and nurture children in development nor their abilities to actually do so. That is to say, it is not the aim to question or evaluate whether new strategies of ‘children in development’ in fact do help children, rather it is to investigate their very possibilities for being able to do so.

Notes

1. I have elsewhere described this recast, which took place somewhere during the course of the mid 1980s, as the ‘birth of human development’ (Wahlberg 2001).

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